Title of the Practice: Field Border (NRCS Conservation Practice 386)

Definition: A strip of permanent vegetation established at the edge or around the perimeter of a field.

Purposes: Field borders protect soil and water quality, improve air quality, reduce soil erosion, provide wildlife food and cover, enhance beneficial and pollinator habitat, manage plant pests and increase carbon storage.

General Expectations: The practice is applied around the perimeter of fields. Its use can support or connect other buffer practices within and between fields. Minimum field border widths shall be 10 feet. Adapted species of perennial grass, legumes and/or shrubs shall be chosen for planting into prepared soils. Species chosen should not serve as hosts for insects and/or diseases of crops grown in adjacent fields. Species selected will have the physical characteristics necessary to control wind and water erosion to tolerable levels on the field border area. Vegetation selection and management shall be in accordance with NRCS Practice Standards 512 (Forage and Biomass Planting/NC Planting Guide) or 645 (Upland Wildlife Habitat Management/Appendix 1).

Additional management expectations for specific conservation purposes:

* When the field border is established with improvements in air quality as a primary concern (e.g. drift from conventional to organic fields), establish plant species with physical characteristics that optimize interception and adhesion of airborne particulates. Select plants with persistent roots and residue that stabilize soil aggregates.
* When the provision of wildlife food and cover has been identified as a primary purpose, consult “Additional Criteria to Provide Wildlife Food and Cover” for technical criteria. Implementation must include vegetative establishment of appropriate mixed species and cannot be ‘volunteer’ vegetation.
* Establish stiff-stemmed, upright grasses, grass/legumes or forbs to trap wind- or water-born soil particles. Locate borders to eliminate sloping end rows, headlands and other areas where concentrated water flows will enter or exit the field (30’ in width with density equivalent to a good stand of wheat). Orient plant rows as closely as possible to perpendicular to sheet flow direction.
* As a harbor for beneficial organisms for pest management purposes, include species that attract predators and parasites that target pests.
* For wildlife food and cover and pollinator habitat, borders must be at least 20 feet wide. Trees and shrubs may comprise up to 10% of the cover. Select vegetation as per Practice 645/Appendix, and apply NRCS ‘Early Successional Habitat Management (647) practices to 30-50% of the total field border’s length annually. The border must be located at least 20 feet from the hard surface edge of a public road and the habitat portion shall not be used as a travel way or turnrow.
* For purposes of increasing soil carbon storage, maximize the width and length of the herbaceous border. Do not burn the border, nor disturb the roots of the established vegetation with tillage.

Additional management considerations for specific resource concerns:

* Consider planting field borders around to entire field to multiply resource benefits.
* Native plants are best suited for wildlife and pollinator habitat and provide diverse pollen and nectar sources for beneficials.
* Field borders can be used as corridors to connect existing or planned habitat blocks.
* Waterbars or berms may be needed to breakup or redirect concentrated water flow within borders.
* Considerations with respect to plant selection include tolerance to sedimentation, drought and/or shade tolerance, desirable visual effects and possible interference with field operations or border maintenance.

Operation and Maintenance: Repair damage from sedimentation, traffic, tillage and any erosion effects that occur in border areas. Maintain desirable plant communities through cultural practices such as burning and mowing. Maintenance activities that result in disturbance of vegetation should not be conducted during the nesting season of grass-nesting birds. Avoid vehicle traffic when soil moisture conditions are saturated.

Practice financing (2014):

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| Practice | Component\* | Unit | Practice Rate NC/SC |
| Field Border | Introduced HU\*\* | Acre | $326.14/415 |
| Field Border | Native HU\*\* | Acre | $446.45/364 |
| Field Border\*\*\* | Organic seed HU\*\* | Acre | $373.22 |
| Field Border | Pollinator HU\*\* | Acre | $480.20/397 |

\* Includes forgone income

\*\*HU = Historically Underserved and Beginning Farmer Rates

\*\*\*NC only